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# Four Quarters

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Cover: "William Shakespeare." Engraving of J. Houbraken (1743)  
from the "Chandos" portrait, now in the National Portrait  
Gallery. Print now in the Study Collection of La Salle College.  
(Formerly in the collection of the Duke of Bedford.)

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# Marginalia . . .

## HOW CAN WE TELL THE DANCER FROM THE DANCE?

*Erica Jong's first novel, Fear of Flying, currently leads the paperback best seller list. There are 2.4 million copies of the book in paperback and a movie version in production. The book has given Ms. Jong the kind of commercial success few poets experience, but not without cost. It happens that her heroine, a young Jewish poet who marries a Chinese American psychiatrist, bears certain obvious similarities to the author, a young Jewish poet who married a Chinese American psychiatrist. Since the book features a number of those scenes publishers usually describe as "daring," "intimate," or "startlingly frank," those readers who read novels as an exercise in literary voyeurism have focused upon Ms. Jong herself.*

*In one of the many interviews that have accompanied her sudden notoriety, Ms. Jong said she was beginning to feel a little like Nathaniel West's Miss Lonelyhearts because she gets so many letters from unhappy people who empathize with her heroine enough to want to share their problems and fantasies with her creator. Her identification with her free spirited heroine has led, she admits, to a rising number of propositions at cocktail parties, accompanied, one supposes, by a knowing wink and a reference to a particularly spicy page in the book.*

*Behind these varied reactions is a shared assumption: since heroine Isadora Wing possesses some of the qualities of Erica Jong, the novel is, ipso facto, "autobiographical," and denials are received with a leer. The novel becomes a window on the author's private life and the reader a peeping Tom.*

*Yet it is historically true that readers have always been fascinated by the relation between the art work and the maker. Art does not come out of nowhere but out of the experiences and imagination of an artist. But how much of the finished product is experience and how much is imagined? How much the artifact and how much the artist? Yeats defined the problem for us in those memorable lines from "Among School Children":*

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance*

*How can we tell the dancer from the dance?*

*What originally touched off these reflections on life and art was the receipt of the manuscript of Victor Strandberg's*

*(Continued on Page 51)*

# Festering Lilies

On Surveying the Secret Life of William Shakespeare

VICTOR STRANDBERG

A HALF CENTURY and more has elapsed now since T. S. Eliot declared *Hamlet* to be "most certainly an artistic failure."<sup>1</sup> "What is deficient in *Hamlet*," Eliot went on to say, is that "Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear." The overwhelming mood of *Hamlet* is disgust, "disgust . . . occasioned by his mother, but . . . his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her." *Hamlet* lacks, in Eliot's renowned phraseology, an "objective correlative," or a reasonably understandable rationale for his mood, lacking which we are reduced to guessing at some catastrophe in Shakespeare's personal life concerning which *Hamlet* is his author's too-cryptic surrogate. "We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle; under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know."

One source of *Hamlet*'s black mood can be quite reasonably traced into Shakespeare's biography: the death of his only son, Hamnet, in August, 1596, at the age of eleven and a half. Worsening his immediate grief (which evidently influenced the writing of *King John*, then under composition), Shakespeare was pinning his hopes for a Shakespeare family dynasty on the boy, and was thereafter moved to offer special financial considerations to whichever daughter produced a male heir (they never did). Just possibly, in addition, the death of Shakespeare's father in September, 1601, may have affected the writing of *Hamlet*,

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<sup>1</sup> This comment and the following quotations from T. S. Eliot are taken from the essay on "Hamlet and His Problems" (originally published in 1919) in *Selected Essays of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950), pp. 121-26.

though this happenstance may well have occurred after the play was finished. Either way, the death of an only son or a beloved father would certainly suffice to explain Hamlet's savage mood with respect to death—his monologue on suicide, his puns and songs with the gravedigger, his black laughter about a king going a progress (a royal tour) through the guts of a beggar. For Shakespeare and Hamlet alike, the objective correlative is there.

It is the other component of Hamlet's disgust, his attitude toward sex, that entails a mysteriously missing motivation. Hamlet's rage towards his mother, and his even more brutal treatment of Ophelia, driving the girl into madness and suicide, are not at all understandably motivated, and this fact is what has given rise to the search for some explanation outside the play itself, that is, in the creative mind that made it. Given this situation, the best place we can look for clues is in Shakespeare's Sonnets, that extraordinary emotional diary which is about all we possess in the way of Shakespearean self-revelation. Mr. Eliot himself located the only clue he could find to Hamlet's strange mood (and Shakespeare's behind it) in the Sonnets, though he found the mystery yet unsolvable: "*Hamlet*, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light . . ." What I propose to do in this paper is precisely to drag some of the stuff of the Sonnets into the light, and by a combination of whatever background facts we know plus some common sense speculation on the actual contents of the Sonnets—especially the never-anthologized ones—we may better define the emotional catastrophe Mr. Eliot was looking for. In doing this, we can not only comprehend Hamlet's otherwise inexplicable mood but can gain a sense of how Shakespeare's master theme of Betrayal (of Love, or Trust) emerged from the Sonnets and took possession of his other greatest works through the following decade—plays like *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*.

It may seem strange that such an undertaking is deemed necessary with so much scholarship on the Sonnets on record, yet a large scale ignorance or evasion of the Sonnets' implications has continued in force, to my observation. A fastidious discretion on the part of many Shakespeare scholars appears to have played a considerable part in the problem, as though a homosexual experience were too unsavory a subject to be contemplated in connection with Shakespeare. Rather than consider seriously such implications in a number of these poems, scholars have often



preferred to advance any alternative view that might be at all arguable. M. M. Reese, for example, grounds his reading on the Platonic tradition that "the friendship of a man for a man was deeper and nobler than his love for a woman"; this, Mr. Reese says, "was the romantic convention of classic literature which the Renaissance had enthusiastically revived."<sup>2</sup> (C. S. Lewis, although feeling that "this does not seem to be the language of full-blown pederasty," nonetheless found nothing as warm as Shakespeare's passion in *his* understanding of this Elizabethan convention: "His language is too lover-like for that of ordinary male friendship.")<sup>3</sup> More recently, in 1963, A. L. Rowse makes bold to settle the whole question forever in one grand statement: "There is not the slightest trace of homosexuality in Shakespeare or even interest in the subject."<sup>4</sup> Earlier scholars like Chambers and Kittredge, while not so confident as Rowse about Shakespeare's sexual orthodoxy, have largely limited their observations to the careful innuendos allowable to their upbringing in the genteel tradition; or conversely, a few rebels like Oscar Wilde and Samuel Butler have gone galloping off into fantasies of interpretation subservient to their own psychic needs.<sup>5</sup> All this is historically understandable, but while taking due note of E. K. Chambers' warning that "more folly has been written about the sonnets than about any other Shakespearean topic,"<sup>6</sup> we should feel free in these days of Portnoy and Myra Breckinridge to take a perfectly open approach to the subject.

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<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare: *His World and His Work* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1953), p. 413 n.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 503-05.

<sup>4</sup> A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> George Lyman Kittredge, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1936), p. 1492, says, "In treating the Sonnets as material for Shakespeare's biography, we should not forget that we are dealing with the supreme dramatist." Probably Kittredge was influenced by Sidney Lee's argument in *A Life of Shakespeare* (1898) that the people in the Sonnets are fictional. A discussion of Oscar Wilde's and Samuel Butler's theories about the Sonnets appears in S. Schoenbaum's *Shakespeare's Lives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). In the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* of July, 1889, Wilde identified the golden boy of the Sonnets as a lovely boy actor named Willie Hughes who played those nubile nymphs, Viola, Rosalind, Juliet, etc., in the all-male company. Samuel Butler, inspired by Wilde's conjecture, conjured up a young sailor named Willie Hughes, with whom Shakespeare had a single furtive "pederastic interlude" that proved the basis of the Sonnets. Butler's own homosexual anguish—his recent betrayal by a male lover—seems unmistakable in this instance, according to Schoenbaum. Ironically, Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's Judas, published a volume in 1933 supporting Wilde's theory.

<sup>6</sup> E. K. Chambers, *A Short Life of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 124.

TO BEGIN with the "known" background, scholars pretty largely agree upon the following information: that the Sonnets were written over about a five-year period when Shakespeare was in his thirties; that they deal with their author's love relationship with at least two people, one of them a young man and the other a "dark lady"; and that they were intended to be a private expression of emotion (a pirated edition appeared in 1609). Internal evidence—especially Sonnets 40, 41, 42, and 144—shows that the young man and the lady eventually developed a liason with each other, thereby plunging the poet into the bottommost depths of humiliation and despair, and intensifying the feeling of Betrayal that would later emerge as Shakespeare's lifelong obsession. From this point on, the facts become less certain, and controversy rages. To avoid sinking into the quicksand of endless argument, let us limit our background inquiry to a couple of questions and then look into some specific poems.

First, the question of how many lovers the Sonnets are addressed to seems best answered by the traditional subdivision: Sonnets 1-126 appear addressed to a single young man, with the remaining poems addressed to the dark lady. If there were more than one young man involved, as some have argued, it would seem strange that Shakespeare would apologize for his redundancy, as he does in Sonnet 76—

Why is my verse so barren of new pride?  
So far from variation or quick change? . . .  
O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,  
And you and love are still my argument . . .

—and again in Sonnet 108:

What's new to speak, what now to register,  
That may express my love or thy dear merit?  
Nothing, sweet boy; but yet, like prayers divine,  
I must each day say o'er the very same . . .

The identity of the golden boy has been a vexing question, but the preponderance of evidence has come down very largely to a choice between two candidates: the Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated his early poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*; or Lord Pembroke, the later patron of Shakespeare to whom the First Folio was dedicated. Both individuals were extremely attractive, both during their teens resisted strong pressure to get married (Sonnets 1-17, the "Procreation Sonnets," were so-called because they beg the young man to get married and have children), and both have appro-



priate initials (Henry Wriothesley, William Herbert) that might connect with the Sonnets' dedication in 1609 "To Mr. W. H."<sup>7</sup> Georg Brandes, E. K. Chambers, and Dover Wilson, highly respected scholars all, have favored Pembroke which would mean that the Sonnets were written in the late 1590's and early 1600's (Lord Pembroke was born in 1580); Alden Brooks, A. L. Rowse, and others have favored Southampton, born in 1573 and thus in his late teens when Shakespeare came under his patronage.<sup>8</sup> According to A. L. Rowse—he who found "not the slightest trace" of homosexuality in Shakespeare—Southampton would have presented the more queenly appearance of the two:

Anyone who studies the portrait made of Southampton when he was nineteen will see how striking his beauty was. There are the familiar golden tresses, which he retained for some years more, falling over his left shoulder, the haughty aristocratic look on the face, a perfect oval, delicate features, lightly arched eyebrows, sensitive nostril, small mouth. It is a feminine appearance, yet there is . . . masculinity in the assertive stare of the eyes. . . . There is something that gives an unfavourable impression—a touch of obstinacy and fixation, in the eyes and pouting lip, a look of self-will.<sup>9</sup>

A face such as this might quite reasonably be correlated with those strange opening lines of Sonnet 20: "A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted/Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion." Southampton's parental situation, fatherless and mother-dominated, also happens to fit a very frequent psychic profile of male homosexuals, according to Freud and other psychologists. Finally, the first seventeen or "Procreation" Sonnets seem to parallel not only the general situation of "Venus and Adonis" (dedicated to Southampton) in showing a youth totally resistant to female charms, they also convey the same sentiments in almost the same phrases. Think how smoothly lines

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7 The initials of Southampton's name, Henry Wriothesley, are reversed in the Sonnets' dedication, "To Mr. W. H.," but this could be either a printer's error or perhaps a code designation, like the name-play in Sonnets 20 and 135, which give us the name "Will Hughes" as a composite clue to "W. H.'s" identity. The use of a commoner's title, "Mr.," rather than an aristocratic form of address also complicates the issue; this too may have been a tactic in screening the lover's identity. In any case, we can deal with the Sonnets well enough without knowing the names in question.

8 Georg Brandes, in *William Shakespeare* (New York: Macmillan, 1924, pp. 271-76), strongly favors Pembroke; Sir Edmund Chambers initially favored Southampton (*William Shakespeare*, I, 564) but later endorsed Pembroke; Alden Brooks, in *Will Shakespeare and the Dyer's Hand* (New York: Scribner's, 1943 p. 105) backs Southampton.

9 Shakespeare: A Biography, p. 140.

171-74 of *Venus and Adonis* would fit into any of the first seventeen Sonnets, for example:

By law of nature thou art bound to breed,  
That thine may live when thou thyself art dead;  
And so, in spite of death, thou dost survive,  
In that thy likeness still is left alive.

In this corner, then, we register a vote for Southampton as the mystery boy. But his identity doesn't really matter very much; for us, what matters is the quality of the passion that Shakespeare invested in this relationship, and the evident effect of the whole experience on his art. If perhaps the boy's mother or guardian had commissioned Shakespeare to write the early Sonnets in an effort to get the lad interested in marriage, it would seem that by the time Shakespeare had passed the "Shall I compare thee to a summer day" stage and begun calling the youth "the master-mistress of my passion," the poet himself was in danger of becoming part of the problem rather than fostering a solution. To be sure, this same Sonnet 20 does platonically eschew the young man's genital apparatus, Nature (Shakespeare tells him) having "prick'd thee out for woman's pleasure," thereby adding "one thing to my purpose nothing." Nonetheless, some rather uncommon chemical affinities seem to be at work here, and by Sonnet 35, those affinities have produced what can only be reasonably adduced as bitter sexual jealousy. Vladimir Nabokov has written, "I cannot help feeling there is something essentially wrong about love . . . What is this mysterious exclusiveness? One may have a thousand friends, but only one love-mate.<sup>10</sup> Here in Sonnet 35, where the friend is repeatedly imaged as a beautiful surface that conceals putrid filth and corruption, what motive other than sexual possessiveness might warrant such an eruption? What else the belabored forgiveness, for that matter?—

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:  
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;  
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,  
And loathsome canker dwells in sweetest bud.

Certainly, had the patron extended mere spiritual friendship, however warm and possessive, to others, that would not suffice to explain these images of foul corruption that Shakespeare ascribes to the patron's nature—the mud at the fountain's bottom, the loathsome canker that dwells in sweetest bud, and the like. Nor would a sexual love correlate with Shakespeare's

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<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1941), p. 106.

desperate rationalizations of his suffering, his Olympic leap in Sonnet 42, for example, from "Shakespeare crucified" (on discovering the dalliance between patron and dark lady) to "joy" in the metaphysical oneness that joins himself to his lover-rival:

Both find each other, and I lose both twain,  
And both for my sake lay on me this cross:  
But here's the joy: my friend and I are one;  
Sweet flattery! then she loves but me alone.

Memorable, too, is the picture of Shakespeare the insomniac (Sonnet 61), presumably estranged or at least physically distant from the lover now and complaining that "thy image should keep open/My heavy eyelids to the weary night." Is it likely that mere spiritual communion between the lover and others is causing Shakespeare's "slumbers to be broken,/While shadows like to thee do mock my sight"? And the closing couplet surely resembles nothing so much as sexual jealousy in action—that desire for total, permanent, and exclusive possession which appears to be bound up with the sex instinct: "For thee watch I whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,/From me far off, with others all too near."

Skipping over the "rival poet" Sonnets (78-86), where the speaker's jealousy requires no sexual basis, we come to the marvelous Sonnet 94, whose image of the lover as a summer flower turns up a bitter stench indeed:

But if that flower with base infection meet,  
The basest weed outbraves his dignity;  
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;  
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

(So apt was that final line to Shakespeare's feeling that it turns up again in one of the apocryphal plays, *Edward III*—Act II, scene i—though the word "smell" has been softened to "seem.")<sup>11</sup>

The tables turn, delightfully, in Sonnet 110, where Shakespeare evidently has been pressed to confess that he's been no angel either, having wallowed in the same wild promiscuity he cannot abide in his lover and having, moreover, been caught lying about it:

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there,  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,  
Made old offences of affections new;

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<sup>11</sup> C. F. Tucker Brooke, in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), p. xx, calls *Edward III* "in some ways the most extraordinary of all the doubtful plays." He ascribes the latter, inferior half of the play to George Peele, but credits Shakespeare for the passage containing our lilies that fester (II, ii, 451),



Most true it is that I have look'd on truth  
Askance and strangely . . . .

The extraordinary thing about this confession, and what gives it its authentic Shakespearean touch, is the magnificent rationalization by which Shakespeare justifies *his* infidelities—no festering lily, he!—unjust though his lover's wanderings have been. In the first place, says our poet, "by all above,/These blenches gave my heart another youth"; in the second—and this is the mind boggler—"And worse essays proved thee my best of love." Who after all can reasonably object to be *proved* his sweetheart's best lover and how else can it be done but by sampling pastures elsewhere? The perverse creativity behind a line like that bespeaks a mind that might easily give forth an Aaron, an Edmund, or an Iago, with their unanswerable sophistries. Appropriately the poem ends on a note of sweet reconciliation that stands in welcome contrast to the rage, dread, and chagrin animating so many of these sonnets:

Now all is done, have what shall have no end:  
Mine appetite I never more will grind  
On newer proof, to try an older friend,  
A god in love, to whom I am confined."

(One wonders, in passing, how the Platonic or anti-homosexual interpreters get past *this* poem; mainly by skipping over it evidently.)

Regrettably, this little oasis of good feeling in Sonnet 110 cannot last, and the relationship shows continuing signs of deterioration. As far back as Sonnet 36, Shakespeare had complained of the mental pain caused by the secrecy of their connection—a secrecy, incidentally, that seems hard to justify in any terms other than that of a homosexual entanglement, since intense platonic affection among men was not at all taboo in that pleasantly pre-Freudian era:

Let me confess that we two must be twain,  
Although our undivided loves are one . . . .  
I may not evermore acknowledge thee,  
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame,  
Nor thou with public kindness honour me,  
Unless thou take that honour from thy name . . . .

A secret causes pain because it isolates its bearer, who must forever mask his deepest soul in circumspection. When one considers the precariousness of ordinary marriage, despite the social, religious, and legal sanctions—and in most cases children—binding the contract, who can doubt the double sorrow of a homosexual union, accursed in the light of those same

sanctions and with neither children nor public witness to act as a cementing agent? Encompassed thus by the continuous pain of secret-keeping and subject to harrowing bouts of infidelity—both actual and imaginary—on the part of both lovers, Shakespeare's affair with the golden boy crumbled at last before the most dread onslaught of all: that bugbear of the Sonnets, Time's slow corrosion of physical beauty.

Here we must pause for a moment to reflect on W. H. Auden's much-quoted statement that there is nothing more pathetic than the plight of an aging homosexual. What Auden obviously meant was that homosexual union, lacking the usual social supports, depends all the more strongly on physical attractiveness for love's continuation. Mere external looks may often be the surest guarantee of continued union; and it is tragically clear that the Shakespeare of the Sonnets was progressively losing his. Sonnet 19 offers a keenly painful retrospect on this predicament; here Shakespeare sought to stem Time's ravages by verbal adjuration:

... do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,  
To the wide world and all her fading sweets;  
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:

O, carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow . . .

Ironically, Shakespeare's final trauma arose precisely from this answered prayer: Time touches the youth only to augment his beauty, while sweeping Shakespeare himself completely outside the arena of sexual competition and selection. Sonnet 68, which may be the weirdest or most puzzling sonnet of them all, gains some clarity from this perspective. Here the speaker looks admiringly at an older man who refuses to use cosmetics ("bastard signs of fair"); the speaker reacts with particular vehemence to the prospect (or advice, perhaps?) of wearing a blond wig or toupee:

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,  
When beauty lived and died as flowers do now,  
Before these bastard signs of fair were born,  
Or durst inhabit on a living brow;  
Before the golden tresses of the dead,  
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,  
To live a second life on second head . . .

Scorning such borrowed beauty, Shakespeare would rather let one's age stand, like the older man's, "Without all ornament, itself and true,/Making no summer of another's green . . ."

To be sure the speaker in the above poem is not necessarily Shakespeare, refusing to bewig and rouge himself, but there is

little question that the breakup of Shakespeare's great love affair was caused primarily, in his own judgment, by his failing looks. By the late 1590's, when Shakespeare was in his mid-thirties, thinning hair, deepening ridges in his face, and—given the primitive dentistry of the time—teeth badly rotting or missing would be the normal instance while the golden boy would concomitantly be just now blooming into his prime, in his early twenties (if Southampton) or his late teens (if Pembroke). Hence Shakespeare, though by no means the feeble old man of his metaphor, depicts himself as dying of old age in the famous Sonnet 73—"That time of year thou mayst in me behold/When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang . . . ." It was not the man but the love relationship that was dying, it appears, and with it the man's inmost soul was being extinguished in great pain.

Sonnet 116—"Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments"—sounds Platonic enough, since it speaks of a marriage of minds, but the impediments in question turn out to be something carnal, namely the alterations for the worse in Shakespeare's physical appearance with his loss of "rosy lips and cheeks" to Time's bending sickle in a later quatrain. The poem thus represents a desperate and ultimately pathetic attempt to slow love's decay by mere moral suasion, through proclaiming that *real* love would not consider such physical change significant: "Love is not love/Which alters when it alteration finds." If the "alteration" here mentioned is indeed in Shakespeare's appearance—and why else would he specify the loss of rosy lips and cheeks a few lines later?—this fact would further confirm that the relationship of these two men is at bottom sexual; if the love were asexual, the loss of rosy looks would in fact make no difference. But as it stands, the poem is in the nature of a protest, a splendid and futile outcry as to how love *should*, by rights, operate:

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If only it really worked that way! But Sonnet 126, the last in the golden boy series, confirms the opposite picture:

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power  
 Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle, hour;  
 Who hast by waning grown and therein show'st  
 Thy lovers withering as thy sweet self grow'st . . . .

All Shakespeare can do at this juncture is to render the younger



man a warning: you just wait until this happens to you!—

Yet fear her[Nature], O thou minion of her pleasure!

She may detain, but still not keep, her treasure:

Her audit, though delayed, answer'd must be,

And her quietus is to [sur]render thee.

The dark lady poems reveal if anything, an ever sourer end of the affair, since the poet feels free to recriminate against her without rationalizing her behavior. Whereas Shakespeare had, in marvelous tones of self-pity, invited the young man to "Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all . . . /I do forgive thy robbery gentle thief" (Sonnet 40), and had further absolved him in Sonnet 41 ("when a woman woos what woman's son/Will sourly leave her till she have prevail'd?"), no such magnanimity is extended to the woman, "my female evil" of Sonnet 144, who "tempteth my better angel from my side,/And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,/Wooing his purity with her foul pride." ("Pride" was a pun for sexual lust.) To the contrary, whatever grace of spirit we find in this series tends to accrue to Shakespeare himself, who credits himself—in an interesting contrast to Othello—for knowingly accepting his lady's lies as truth in Sonnet 138: "When my love swears that she is made of truth,/I do believe her, though I know she lies . . . /O love's best habit is in seeming trust." And to whatever extent Shakespeare has sinned, the lady has always gone him one better: "In loving me thou know'st I am forsworn,/But thou art twice forsworn . . ." (Sonnet 152). Who can doubt that a mind capable of these slanted perspectives would, when left alone at last with its final true love (art), be well furnished toward the creation of an Edmund, a Lady Macbeth, or a Cressida?

There is little reason to doubt, in any case, the authenticity of Shakespeare's revulsion against sex in Sonnet 129, the famous blast against "lust in action" that reveals a mind moved close to madness by desire, guilt, and frustration. Aside from a few islands of joy, the whole experience of the Sonnets has come pretty largely to fulfill the prophecy laid down at the end of *Venus and Adonis*, where the goddess, thwarted (by the death of Adonis) from slaking her own desire, pronounces this fierce curse on love among mortals:

. . . lo, here I prophecy,

Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend:

It shall be waited on with jealousy,

Find sweet beginning but unsavory end;

Ne'er settled equally, but high or low,

That all love's pleasure shall not match his woe.

It shall be fickle, false, and full of fraud;  
Bud and be blasted, in a breathing-while;  
The bottom poison, and the top o'erstraw'd  
With sweets that shall the truest sight beguile . . .

**E**VEN so brief a tour of the Sonnets, then, provides strong evidence that Shakespeare's soul was crushed practically to destruction in these tragic encounters. He gave his male friend, in particular, everything he had, committing his whole being to their relationship, only to be rewarded in the end with a great betrayal that evidently cast its shadow over nearly everything Shakespeare would write thereafter, tragedies and bitter comedies alike. Certain problem plays, like *Hamlet*, become almost unintelligible apart from the light the Sonnets cast upon them. Certainly Hamlet's treatment of women, his unaccountable brutality toward Ophelia and his gross bullying of his mother ("Nay, but to live/In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,/Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love . . ."—III, iv. 93-95)—this behavior is not understandable in terms of anything those feeble, pathetic creatures have done to deserve this. (T. S. Eliot's complaint is perfectly just on this score.) Hamlet's behavior is reasonable only in the light of what happened to Shakespeare in the Sonnets, the poet's bitterness against woman in general finding expression in Hamlet's misogyny and loathing of sexuality *per se*. Similarly, characters like Othello, Leontes, Coriolanus, and even Lear ("Let copulation thrive!" etc.,—IV, vi, 116) are clearly more understandable in the perspective of the Great Betrayal of the Sonnets.

The dilemma Eliot poses, then, is not at all hopeless. A close, careful reading of all the Sonnets, supported by biography and a reasonable exercise of intuition may go a long ways toward divulging the secret soul of the Master. But this can happen only in a large and open study, not through the common tactic of analysis and appreciation of a handful of sonnets in isolation, like gems from a broken necklace. Otherwise, the loss of meaning is enormous. Shakespeare wrote his deepest being into these poems, his most traumatic passions, and if he later developed into the master psychologist of the human soul, it is only because his own soul had been subject to a fiery crucible of emotions that taught him fear, rage, jealousy and their attendant rationalizations as few men have ever known them. He also gained something from it all which is perhaps best described in Rollo May's psychology. Speaking of "an element in sex and love which is almost universally repressed in our culture, namely the *tragic*,

*daimonic element*" (emphasis his), Dr. May proceeds to define "daimonic" as "the natural element within an individual, such as the erotic drive, which has the power to take over the whole person."<sup>12</sup> Only when a man's soul is thus integrated, unified in one all-consuming obsession, can he know the greatest depths of emotion deserving of the epithet *tragic*:

The daimonic is present in all nature as blind, ambiguous power. But only in man does it become allied with the tragic. For tragedy is self-conscious, personal realization of being in the power of one element . . . . We have only to call to mind Romeo and Juliet, Abelard and Heloise, Tristan and Isolde, Helen of Troy, to see the power of sexual love to seize a man and a woman, lift them up into a whirlwind that defies rational control and may destroy not only themselves but others at the same time.

The daimonic element, according to May, encompasses not only erotic monomania (such as we see in the Sonnets) but other master passions—"sex and eros, anger and rage, and the craving for power are examples"<sup>13</sup>—that are identified with major Shakespearean characters: Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, Timon of Athens.

To all these things the Sonnets are the key that unlocked Shakespeare's heart, as Wordsworth put it in "Scorn Not the Sonnet." Whether a "god in love" or a lily that festered, the love object in these poems galvanized the poet's soul into unity, providing at the same time the "objective correlative" whose absence made Hamlet's emotional excesses so mystifying to Mr. Eliot. In passing, we might also note with some satisfaction this confirmation of an old truism: that we learn most about the human soul not from normal, healthy folk—those who are likely to become Steinbecks or Masfelds—but from the world's weird people, those roiled in the torment of some deep, and most often secret, trauma.

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<sup>12</sup> This and the following quotation are cited from an essay called "Antidotes for the New Puritanism" that appeared in the *Saturday Review* and later in an anthology called *Relevants* (ed. Quinn and Dolan, New York: The Free Press, 1970), cp. 318. The essay is condensed from Dr. May's book *Love and Will*.

<sup>13</sup> Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: Delta Books, 1969), p. 123.



# The Knowledge of a Lifetime

TOM HANSEN

What was there  
(room, woman, rocking chair)  
and what he made of it  
(grey and black arrangement)  
were not mirrors —  
nature makes too many errors.  
"To say to the painter that  
nature is to be taken as she is,  
is to say to the player  
that he may sit on the piano."  
Music is what he does to it,  
what has passed through the alembic  
of the painter's brain.

No horns or cymbals,  
no tympanous Tintoretto or Titian  
or Rubens reds for Whistler.  
Drawn to music more somber,  
Harmonies, Nocturnes, and Etudes  
trace the muted moods that shadows bring.  
"Old Battersea Bridge:  
Nocturne in Blue and Gold" —  
evening devotion told on a cello.  
The summer sky no longer  
endlessly echoing blue,  
but an all but audible voice  
that utters, almost, its name.  
There in the middle distance,  
receding city lights  
counterpoint the genesis of night.

# Cruising Thirty

KATE JENNINGS

IT WAS too hot to breathe. Carrie rocked slowly in the porch swing, savoring the small breeze the stir caused. Inside her the baby moved, and her apple-green dress rose and fell. She didn't glance down. She looked through the thick lilac bushes to the street, which shimmered in waves through the heat. Everything in her line of vision looked varnished. The blue sky was so pale it seemed white. A passing car's chrome was painfully bright, striking pinwheels of glitter like sparklers against her eyes.

It was late August. Her baby and her birthday were now neck to neck, both due September first. Her face was flushed from the heat and her long hair escaped in moist tendrils from its knot. She raised her glass of iced tea and drank. The ice cubes rattled and the swing's chain squeaked, a languid chorus. She had written in her diary, at fifteen, "I have my whole life to live over again before I'll be even thirty." Well—happy days—she had lived that life and now—happy day—here she was, thirty. Nearly.

Her friend Shelley came into view, carrying her baby Jason on her hip. "Whew!" she called in greeting. She climbed the three steps to the dim porch and sat down next to Carrie on the swing. She settled Jason on her lap and looked at Carrie's lap speculatively. "Well, which do you reckon will come first, your baby or your birthday."

Carrie laughed lazily. "Can't say. But I'll be glad to get into the hospital just for the air conditioning."

"You must be dead," Shelley agreed. She supported Jason in a sitting position with the palm of her hand against his bare back. "What do you *say*?" she asked him. He wobbled his head around to look at her and grinned in toothless pleasure. They watched him examine his hands. He managed with great effort

to clasp them, then raise them to his mouth to suck noisily. Carrie's baby turned and spun, more deft by far than earth-bound Jason, whose outgrown clothes he would wear.

"I'm thinking about getting my hair cut," Carrie said.

"You're kidding."

"No. It's been long too long, and I think thirty's about time to look my age."

Shelley snorted. "Who wants to look thirty?" Carrie didn't answer, and after a moment Shelley said, "When I was in school in Milwaukee there was this story, no doubt apocryphal, that a pregnant woman could buy liquor even if she was under-age—the logic being that if you were old enough to have a baby, you were old enough to drink." She studied Carrie. "I don't think you look anywhere *near* thirty, or me either."

"But who do we know who *does*?"

"No one," Shelly admitted. "Though sometimes the kids I see look thirty. They look older than we do, for sure." She jiggled Jason and said in mock-seriousness, "Drugs. Promiscuity."

Carrie laughed. "Oh Shelley," she said.

"It's true, it's true, all that premature experience ages them prematurely." Shelley had been a guidance counselor at the high school. She had been coerced into quitting four months before Jason's birth by the school board, whose members feared that her pregnant bulk might inspire the students she guided to go and do likewise. Shelley, who knew that her students' imaginations soared beyond mere sex, had been outraged, and Carrie had heard for months about the board's audacity.

"Just the way they dress," Shelly was saying now. "Very few females can overcome the aging effect of rumpled t-shirts and baggy jeans, not to mention frizzed hair."

"Now Shelley," Carrie soothed. "Speaking of hair."

"Yes, yes, you're going to have yours cut," Shelley said. She stroked Jason's damp back rapidly. "How short?"

"I'm not sure. I haven't decided. And I haven't told Jake." She drained the ice tea and added, "I might not do it."

"I bet you will," Shelley said. "Thirty's an important age, you know, a big change. Though the great divide's probably more having a baby than turning thirty."

"I'm crossing both at once."

"I can see why you're thinking of cutting your hair." Shelley stood up, lifting Jason to her shoulder.

"Want some iced tea?" Carrie said belatedly.

"No thanks. I have to get on home. Oh—any new names?"

Carrie shook her head, smiling.



That night she dreamed she was number one girl in a harem. Her sheik, swathed in silk, was entranced by her self-reliance, her fearless air. In her dream she wore a striped robe that flowed and rippled in the hot desert wind. It was the caftan from Rousseau's "Sleeping Gypsy," and that same moon stared impassively down. In the dream her hair was cropped short. She was ready for anything, lithe and quick and her old shape again.

**I**N the morning she went directly to a barber shop and emerged an hour later, a new woman, leaving ten years of tender weight on the barber's floor. Her head felt light. The soft swishing sound of her hair swinging gently around her ears seemed intensely sensuous, the essence of sensuality. The familiar street with its weathered red brick buildings and the clock in front of the bank looked unreal to her dazed eyes. She hurried home, newly shy, happy not to have to meet anyone she knew before she faced Jake.

He was shocked but gracious, and, she suspected, stimulated by this new version of Carrie, an unfamiliar slant on an old friend. "My wife," he said, amazed, staring.

That evening they took a picnic to the park by the river and sat at a rough wooden plank table in the stone shelter like scouts on an outing, talking while their hot dogs grilled. A shaggy collie appeared, summoned by the meat's sizzle, to share their dinner.

Later they walked barefoot through pools of sun-warmed water on the large flat rocks by the river. Carrie, awkward and cumbersome as any pregnant creature, held Jake's arm and leaned against him when they stopped to watch the water. A nearly full moon rose above the trees on the opposite bank.

Jake said, "By the time that's full, I'll be a father."

He was an engineer. Thirty-two. He stroked her new hair and looked at her in the cool light, still puzzled.

"By the time that's full I'll be thirty," she said.

"And maybe a mother."

She laughed and splayed her hands on her abdomen. A few inches from her palms the baby stirred. She stared at the moon, thinking of her dream, and thought she might re-read the Alexandria Quartet, and maybe name her daughter Justine, or Clea. She remembered being charmed in grade school by the name of a classmate: Camille. Eighth grade. She'd asked her mother, "Where do you think Camille's mother got her name?" Her mother had asked what Camille's last name was, and, hearing

it was Dennis, had said scathingly, "Her mother read a book."

Carrie had been named Carrington after some shadowy ancestor. She smiled uneasily and dismissed the names Justine and Clea. David or Andrew or maybe Adam, probably, and most likely Sarah or Elizabeth or definitely Jane, possibly.

She usually thought of the baby as a boy because if she thought of it as a girl it became too real, herself repeated, and she was overcome with shyness. A boy was distant, comfortably removed, maybe Jake repeated, made small enough to hold tight all day for a few years; but a girl was altogether different.

"Long thoughts," Jake said gently.

She turned, smiling. She felt gigantic, massive, a monument to them. The collie nudged her legs. "We should get a dog," she murmured, looking down at him.

"Later we will. I don't want you housebreaking a puppy and a baby simultaneously." She laughed, then sighed and turned back to the moon and he, watching her pensive profile, said, "Turning thirty's less change than a haircut."

ALL night her head felt weightless, as though invaded by that moon, flooded by its giddy light. Inside her the baby bucked and surged. She dreamed she gave birth to a daughter on her own birthday, and in her dream she felt that the baby's birth was her re-birth, an affirmation of her own life's worth. Later that same night she dreamed a vision of her daughter at thirty, unafraid of age, sheiks, sultans, haircuts. In that dream her daughter said, thoughtfully, either, "I've learned a lot" or, "I have a lot to learn."

WHEN the baby (maybe that daughter) was a week away, and Carrie a week shy of thirty, she found, in a dusty antique store, a Victorian high-chair. The dark dry wood was richly scarred, threaded with a baroque network of scratches and gouges. The tray was worn thin at the center. The legs, by means of a complicated graduated series of meshing wheels, could splay to make the chair a walker. Carrie circled it and studied it, pining after it, picturing herself spoon-feeding a baby in it, afraid to ask the price.

It wasn't much, or, at any rate, not much more than she would have paid for a brand new high-chair in boring blond wood with a false glossy finish. She bought it and watched the shop's owner, a wizened elfin old man, wedge it carefully into the car trunk.

On the way home she stopped to show it to her mother, who thought Carrie was too young to have a baby ("Why are you in such a rush?" she'd said. "You're only twenty-nine"), but who came out to the curb willingly and admired the chair. Standing beside the car, arms folded high across her chest, she smiled reluctantly and said, "Well, you got a good price on it, anyway."

Carrie had worked as a high school teacher (at the same school where Shelley had counseled) from the June of her college graduation till the previous June. Her mother had worked as a secretary till her first child was born thirty-five years before, and had never worked since. She sat at home alone, bored, restless, resentful, commenting caustically on other people's lives. At times Carrie was afraid she'd turn out to be her mother: she feared that in spite of all her precautions, inside her, like a time bomb, her mother waited, scowling.

They stood smiling by the car in the honey-heavy sunlight and heat, the mother gaunt, the daughter a bloom of globes. Freshly mowed lawns had greened the air to rank perfume. Summer's scents were fermenting to a tang, to autumn's mellow bite. Overhead leaves rattled like silver in an unseen wind.

"You know—" her mother began, then stopped, lips pursed to a twist.

"What."

"Well, you know when I was your age, when I was thirty, I had three children already, and I always—"

"—regretted it," Carrie finished for her, but mildly, without rancor or anger.

"It was too soon," her mother said.

"This is my first child, not my third."

"But you're *only thirty*."

"Who's only thirty?"

Carrie's sister-in-law, her younger brother's wife, pushed between them, peering into the car trunk. She was twenty-two and had come to pick up her children. Carrie's mother had been baby-sitting.

"Me," Carrie said.

"Yeah, well, you sure waited long enough."

Carrie and her mother exchanged glances, in sympathy for once.

"For what?" Carrie said.

Oh. You know. To have a kid." She surveyed the high-chair critically and added, "I mean, do you realize that by the time this kid turns thirty, you'll be sixty?"

"Imagine," Carrie's mother said dryly. She had turned



sixty the previous spring.

At home Carrie told Jake what Charlene had said. "What's the big deal about turning thirty?" she said plaintively. "It's an age, just a number."

Jake finished his lamb chop and wiped his fingers and said, "Maybe it's because you're having a baby."

"That's more important than turning thirty."

"I know, but it makes turning thirty weightier."

IN the morning the porch swing was wet with dew. Carrie, who had dreamed she was flying, sat on it, drinking coffee, her face flushed with more than heat, her baby big as life in her lap, bulging her dress. She had dreamed she was a co-pilot, a navigator, maybe Anne Lindbergh, sailing skies, under stars, cool and composed. She had seen herself light as air lit by starlight. She swung in and out of shadows and stared through the lilacs at the street. Just out of her line of vision the high-chair, stripped, waited for a coat of stain. Inside, upstairs, in a room with uneven wooden floors, the baby's cradle waited, empty. Jane, Elizabeth, Sarah, she thought, rocking. David. Andrew. Adam.

SHE went to visit her friend Jan, who had had three children before she was twenty-five. Married at twenty, she had enthusiastically talked up the advantages of having children while you were young. At twenty-nine she was trying to get the state's (and her husband's) permission for a tubal ligation. Carrie had once asked her if she might someday want another child and Jan had said grimly, "Never. Never."

On Wednesday the previous Thursday's laundry was heaped in her dining room. Her youngest, his soiled diaper sagging, made the laundry pile a trampoline.

"What's up?" Carrie said, uneasily keeping her eyes off Jan's house and on Jan's taut face, a mirror-image of Carrie's mother's face.

Jan sneered and stepped aside, gesturing sardonically at the chaos around her. Her husband, who had dropped out of college ten years before to serve a two-year stint as a conscientious objector in a sanatorium and gone from there to driving a truck, sat before the television set, his belly nearly the size of Carrie's. He grunted and nodded hello, his eyes on the screen, his hand on his can of beer.

CARRIE dreamed she was wearing a silver dress, a dress made of a miracle fiber that looked like foil or mail and never wrinkled. In her dream she was slender enough to dance, and she held in her hand a Fourth of July sparkler like a sorceress' magic wand. In the dream her hair was its new length: short enough to fit under a soft leather helmet, the kind one might wear to co-pilot a plane.

IN the morning she was twenty-nine for the last time. It was Monday. She moved through the rooms of her house like a stranger, a visitor, looking it all over with an appraiser's eyes. She checked out the baby's room: ship-shape. In the room she shared with Jake, she looked at her clothes, rifling the closet the way Jake ran his hands through her hair. After the baby was born she would once gain try on her clothes like personalities: this pale blue dress would gentle her into someone docile; that short skirt, showing off her slim legs, would give her a certain brazen air. She wondered whether or not she'd be able to resist dressing dowdy when she was thirty (Shelley had once said, "I see myself as middle-aged because I'm a mother"). In high school Carrie and Shelley had worn round-collared blouses and A-line skirts and loafers. Their hair had been as short as Carrie's was now, and more carefully combed and curled.

She looked over her house with last-time eyes, wondering what thirty would mean, what it would signify. Such a round number, the three, the zero, such perfect globes. She thought light-years ahead to forty: that angular four! that lean oh!

At the supermarket she pushed open the screen door with its faded stenciled ad for a soft drink to buy eggs, and ran into her friend Laura, buying bleach.

"Laura, hi," Carrie said, stopping her cart mid-aisle.

Carrie endured her eyes, resisting the impulse to hold her stomach in. Laura had married at nineteen and now, at twenty-nine, had a nine-year-old son. She said smugly, "I guess it must be hard having your first child at thirty."

"I'm just a late bloomer," Carrie said, eying Laura's prematurely aged face, her squat body, her dishpan hands. Before her marriage she'd studied art, turning big wheels, throwing clay.

Carrie stashed her groceries in the car and went to visit Shelley for comfort. She described her meeting with Laura, and all week poured out: her mother, her sister-in-law, the haircut, Jan, her dreams. Jason, owl-eyed, listened from Shelley's knee.

Shelley made faces, grimaced, nodded, finally said "In high school I always thought that girls who weren't virgins were automatically older than I was."

"You mean—who?"

"Anyone. Think of Charlene. She got married when she was eighteen, a true high school sweetheart, and by now she's had all life's big moments. At twenty-two she's been a bride, a wife, a mother; already she's a frump." She squeezed Jason between her palms and said, "Carrie. She's our age, or older. Numerical doesn't count: Charlene's an old lady. She had a lot of what we didn't, you know, the freedom the—what—the social freedom to *drop* out of school, *go* to Europe, *work*, *go* back to school, and she did none of it, you realize? What she did was even less than what we did: a few bridal showers, a big church wedding, baby showers, kids." She kissed Jason's apple face twice and said breathlessly, as though coming up for air, "The age you turn tomorrow's a decade younger than Charlene. Or Laura. Or Jan."

At home Carrie showered, soaping her short hair and her huge belly luxuriantly. She baby-powdered her body and put on a silver-green dress, stiff with starch, cool as October. She brushed her hair into a smooth curve and met Jake on the front porch.

They went out for dinner, for oysters at the pier. The salted air blew over their faces as they faced south, the gulf. They sipped cold beer and swallowed, breath held, oysters whole. Carrie nibbled dry crackers, concentrating on a new stillness inside, and listened to Jake talk. The moon appeared, a pale disc low over the water. Later they walked hand in hand along the pier. The sky was as dark as a tent top. Jake talked easily: work, personalities, plans. Carrie listened, ears tuned inward to where something altogether new seemed to be happening.

At home they sat on the porch, on the swing. Jake found a corked forgotten half-bottle of white wine in the refrigerator and they sipped it from their wedding crystal. Carrie watched starshine glance off the rim of her brimming glass. The wine's surface trembled as the light source changed, and, looking up, she saw that the moon had followed them home from the pier. Full now, it beamed benignly. She stared, transfixed. The silver surface seemed to deepen to blue in certain places, making a face.

She looked at her wristwatch: nearly midnight. Tomorrow she'd be thirty. She put flat palms against her cheeks to cool them and turned to smile at Jake.

He grinned and swirled his icy wine. "Well," he said, and sipped. "Tomorrow's the big day."



She took a big breath and held it and let it out and, looking again at her watch, said, "Yes. It is." Another breath, another glance at her watch, and she said, with a thrust of panic and amusement, "Jake. I think you should call Doctor Sheffield."

The hall light flashed on. From now on everything would happen for a while double-time: no more slow-motion. She heard Jake's voice. It was midnight. He and Doctor Sheffield were in consultation.

She stood up with difficulty. She felt as though she were finally coming in for a landing, carrying her baby, a burden, a fragile cargo. She heard Jake slam the telephone down and she turned, newly serene, to face him, with one final glance at the night sky, one final thought for this transient pain; and she stood still for a moment, poised and awkward and nervous as a bird, on the brink of a new decade. A new life.

## The Color We Hate

SUSAN BARTELS

Vines cover the dark metal of my mailbox,  
wind narrow loops of green  
into its mouth.  
Occasional blossoms,  
deep purple clematis,  
poke out like tongues.  
The postman fears entanglement,  
will not come to the door to complain,  
but slides the letters  
cautiously between the leaves.  
Just after dinner every night  
I trek to the road,  
retrieve the undigested bills,  
the notes from home, announcements, ads  
and envelopes, self-addressed,  
bulging with returned  
green poems.

# Salt of the Earth

J.A.R. WILTON

“**S**HOULD Matilda come? She won't like the heat, you know.”

“We can't take Tamara unless Matilda comes too.”

“But we're *going* for Tamara! We might as well stay in London if Tamara has to be left behind.”

“It would be a pleasant holiday for us both.”

“Eric! We shouldn't have a holiday like this on our own account—it's all for Tamara. I'd never dream of being so lavish if it was just us.”

“I can't imagine anything better, personally. A villa in the Apennines: no responsibility for once in our lives, Tamara safely out of the way, and no nagging conscience to force us into educational excursions for the child's benefit. Bliss!”

“You should be grateful for the chance of a magnificent holiday for yourself while you're broadening Tamara's mind. Two birds with one stone. And as for the spade-work, Matilda will look after that.”

“If she comes.”

“Oh, you're right, she'll have to come. Fortunately she's all agog to.”

“Poor woman! She doesn't realise what she'll have to put up with, Sarah. It's our responsibility to see that she's not made to overtax her strength.”

“You only take that righteous view because you want Tamara to stay behind.”

“Tamara would certainly prefer to stay behind.”

“Oh, Eric, how can you be so selfish? We must do what we know is best by the child.”

“And what is best by Matilda?”

So Eric, who disliked Matilda, argued Christianly on her behalf. And Sarah, fond of Matilda after her fashion during the

eight years of Tamara's life, urged her transportation to a place she would hate.

Not that Matilda anticipated anything unpleasant. A trip abroad—and to Italy too! She relaxed into expanding ripples of contentment—the sun, the spaghetti! She pulled her shawl, of white crocheted wool, tightly round her shoulders as if to emphasise her longing for Mediterranean warmth—oh, no! she loved the sun—the bright Italian weather had been a dream of hers always. And the little girl—she'd go for the little girl if need be to the Antarctic. No question of sacrificing Tamara's first visit to Italy on *her* account! There wouldn't be any sacrifice, make no mistake! And she drew the shawl across her bosom, breathing deep and gently at the prospect.

The packing was already advanced. Eric and Sarah had only at the last minute got around to quarrelling about the very aim of the trip. A flight had been booked which included both Matilda and Tamara. Eric's personal reservations about the arrangement were, from a practical point of view, already irrelevant. But the busy, hot way in which Matilda entered, with all her large person, into the preparations had got on his nerves and he began to imagine the perfect holiday as comprising a respite from her nursely activities.

She was always so energetic; yet always so exhausted by her exertions. She was getting old, but refused to admit it. Eric found that tiresome: because he was young enough to believe that old people, like everyone else, should be their age. It was Matilda's place to preside, gently, at functions in which Tamara was involved—functions such as the child's levee, her breakfast and setting off for school; apart from that, she should be old, weary, silent, crocheting in a rocking chair, which she had brought with her with the characteristic faddishness of great age.

Sarah saw her with the mother's eye: an excellent nurse, who took from her hands all the exhausting work. It was she who had first suggested that the heat would be too much for the old woman—out of genuine sympathy. But her ambition for Tamara outweighed it.

And as the flight was booked, Eric didn't take steps to see that Matilda was excluded.

So it was that the white-haired, heavy old woman, wrapped in her own crochet-work, left her native land for the first and final time, her face mirroring the warmth and roundness of the anticipated sun.

The plane-journey frightened her; but her robust courage was animated by that anticipation into a kind of genuine enjoy-



ment of the adventure. She took great comfort by having the child close beside her.

"Oo-op," she said, as the plane, rolling at a frightening speed, lifted suddenly off the runway and was unexpectedly climbing to a dizzy height above the ground. "Oo-op," and she held the child tight, as if it might fall out of the porthole otherwise.

Tamara stared down at the receding earth. It was a dull day, and as the plane rose higher, and tilted up in a curve, the land swung out and up so that they could both see the immense grey stretch of it. There were broad rays of white sunshine falling mystically upon it; across the grey mass rivers and lakes of water shone with a luminosity never seen from the ground. Brilliantly lit clouds stood round them; and far beyond the land merged in a glistening mist of sunshine.

"But the sun's shining all the time," Tamara said, objecting to the incredible, unreal facts she was now being offered.

"Yes, dear, it's always shining. But you have to go and find it. It's no good sitting down there in gloomy old London. Up here—look—we're above the clouds: it's a whole new land of sunshine."

Tamara agreed. It was a new land; and the clouds looked firm and inviting, like the surface of the moon—waiting with their peaks and valleys and plains to be explored.

"Gloomy old London," the girl repeated.

London, where Matilda had always lived! The centre of her universe, albeit a small universe; but now she was living in a new world. She was already in Italy, and London sank into its own proper shadow.

But the old woman was still nervous, and looked out at the wings of the plane with unease. She studied the rivets which held in place the great curved metal sheets, and was uncertain that they could hold such a great weight together, at such a speed.

Her apprehension reached its peak when the plane began to descend. The hostesses were so much at their ease—they smiled unnecessarily—there must be something wrong, that they tried to dissemble. And the earth came to meet them so rapidly!

But she got off the aeroplane with a joy that she had never known.

They boarded a curious foreign train which took them into the remote depths of the mountains.

When they alighted, Matilda was already hot, too hot to be happy, and carrying her large body with difficulty. Her face smiled still, because the physical discomfort hadn't penetrated

to the core of elation which had grown up within her.

Eric and Sarah were neither too hot physically nor elated spiritually. They were seasoned travellers and now, from London to the villa, they simply travelled. That was all there was to it: a transportation of persons and things from A to B. The holiday for them had not begun.

**W**HEN it did begin, when they had finished the process of settling in, they still didn't surrender to the wholehearted holiday mood which the child and the nurse were feeling. They sat in the small rooms of the modest white villa, darkened by blinds drawn against the sun, and drank Martinis which they might as well have drunk at home. They scarcely looked at the view.

Perhaps to their highly aesthetic sensibilities the view was unpleasing. The villa had a small patio, surrounded by the sloping mountain side patterned regularly with dusty grey olive trees. There was no vine, trailing over the arches of the patio to frame the view artistically. And where the valley bottom should have contained a picturesque river, meandering easily between the scattered rocks which were exposed during the summer drought, there was in fact only a rough dry track leading up into the hills beyond—the hills which stood dry and pale in the heat, like faded cardboard. The reddish earth was scattered with darker patches: gullies or coarse scrub. If one scrutinised closely one discerned a stark white building, square and orange-roofed, with a meagre vineyard and a couple of black cypresses. All the rest was bare, barren; and the regular, regular dottings of olives sloping down past the villa from heights as featureless as those opposite them.

The centre of Italy!

Eric had a book full of coloured reproductions of Simone Martini, Fra Angelico, Perugino: that was where he found his Italian landscape.

Sarah would stand on the terrace and point out to Tamara the objects of interest in the view. She told Tamara all about the peasants and their way of life: the cultivation of olives, and grapes; she found, tethered near the distant cottage, a goat to illustrate her lesson further. Then she showed her Eric's book, and explained that a long time ago certain clever men had known how to put all these beautiful things into their pictures.

Tamara wasn't happy about this relationship between life and art. She preferred to slip down into the olive grove and

watch large black-lacquered butterflies skimming the dry grass, or listen for the thirsty voices of the cicadas. Especially she liked picking the olives and tasting them. She never found one that wasn't bitter; but the very bitterness seemed part of the strange delight she found in this newly discovered world.

Her yellow shirt could be seen gradually moving further from the dry, still patio into the grey-green pattern of the olives, which extended like a sea into the distance. Her mother didn't call her back.

"That's how she'll get to *know* Italy," she said. "By living freely here, and feeling a part of it." She hoped, vaguely, that the child might meet some peasant—a goatherd, or perhaps the family of the distant cottage—and thus become acquainted with the sweet rich truth of Italy.

But Matilda, who revelled in the novelty of everything, uncritically and with spontaneous joy, was capable of feeling the potential danger of the alien terrain. Her heart heaved with a rich kind of fear when she glimpsed the yellow shirt deep in the dessicated grey-green shades of the olives. She stepped down, with laborious care, from the patio onto the hard, uneven earth covered with its thin tangle of vetches and bristling grasses. It was difficult for her to follow where Tamara went, for the olive trees grew to a height which forced her always to stoop beneath their tough, pale-leaved boughs. She went slowly, stumbling on the broken, weed-covered ground, ducking continually under and round the trees, until she could again see the child.

"Tamara!"

The yellow shirt disappeared suddenly. Then,

"Matilda! Here I am!" the girl called, and hid until the old woman had passed her. Then she would skip off again, further, and so protract the chase as long as she chose.

On other occasions, however, Tamara would wait for her, a few paces off down the slope, and hand in hand they picked their way through the grove, seeing nothing but the variegated vegetation round their feet, and the grey-brown, slender trunks of the olives receding in ranks and files, parallel rows to either side, in front, and diagonally on the left and the right. Above, the small, delicately grouped leaves hung against the deeps of the sky, a dark heavy blue background to their paleness.

Once the two of them came out above the olive grove on the hard bare heights of red-dust earth. Immediately below them as they sat and panted in the baking sun, the olive trees whence they had climbed were like a pale green sea evaporating to powder. Beyond, the mountains rose vaster, more oppressive than



before—and by the same token, to their innocent searching spirits, more magnificent and rewarding.

There, jutting out on a shoulder through the regular dotting of olives, was the villa. Its white walls reflected the heavy sunshine. Down there, Eric and Sarah were sipping Martinis, cool and unconcerned. Perhaps Sarah was experimenting with pasta in the kitchen, Eric perusing a Perugino. Both were entering as much as they knew how into the true Italian life.

Matilda watched a boy walking slowly along the ridge just above them. Her eyes, and the wrinkles round them, and all her reddened face, screwed up and focused on him. She touched Tamara's arm, sunburnt and scratched.

"Look, Tammy. Look," she whispered. The girl looked and saw the small figure approaching slowly.

Gradually, and with a curious gait which communicated a sense of physical pain, he came near them. He drove a goat in front of him, a goat with long grey hair reddened by the dust of the hills. They saw that one of his legs ended just above the ankle, and he propped himself, at each step, on a stick which he held awkwardly under his armpit with a hand deprived of three of its fingers. The side of his face corresponding to these mutilated members was a sunken whorl of unwholesome, scarred flesh, grown again after his accident without the guidance of any bone beneath.

Tamara turned away for a moment, and whimpered as if she felt pain. Matilda, screwing up her face still more, stared, and clicked her tongue. She saw that it was not a boy, but a young man, short to the point of deformity. He had thick black eyebrows above gentle eyes. He took them in with a quick but interested glance.

"Giorno," he called.

Neither of them knew what to say. For the first time they realised that they were in a part of the world where one spoke a language other than English.

Matilda nodded and smiled. Then she felt that wasn't enough.

"Good afternoon," she called boldly. "What a lovely afternoon too."

The young man looked at them both more closely. He came painfully towards them. As he came closer, Tamara winced again and turned away, but Matilda took her hand and said,

"Be polite, Tammy, try and be polite."

He suddenly started to talk at them, not fast, as though he hoped they would understand. But when he saw that they didn't he went on at the same deliberate pace. He seemed to have some-

thing to tell them, something which he would communicate simply by repeating it carefully in front of them. At the end of this spate of incomprehensible words, they saw him point to his disintegrated face, and wave his two isolated fingers and the stump of his calf.

"He's telling us how he got hurt," whispered Tamara.

"I believe he is," Matilda whispered back.

She smiled sadly at him.

"Poor boy," she said.

Then he turned and looked out over the valley. He pointed down to the villa, and asked them, evidently, if that was where they came from.

Matilda nodded.

The young man addressed them again briefly, and then, wagging his head and giving the goat a knock with his stick, he went off.

After a short pause Tamara whispered,

"Let's go home now, Matilda."

The nurse wanted to go too. She felt uncomfortable suddenly. It was the effect of seeing the peasant: the sense of pain, of suffering, permeated from so intense a source through to their sun-warmed souls as a discomfort physically felt.

"But let's wait a little longer," she said.

She was affected by the appearance of the young peasant. But she was also beginning to feel a weariness that was the result of her long arduous walk. Tamara began to look around her uneasily, and moved closer to the broad flank of her nurse. It was as if she were afraid that another monster like that might present itself to her unwilling eyes.

It became less hot, and Matilda decided to wait there a little longer, thinking the descent would be easier in the cool of the evening.

"We'll wait until the sun begins to go down, shall we, Tammy? Would you like to play here for a bit?"

But the child wouldn't stir from her hot side, and they sat in the softening sunlight for a long time.

Matilda scanned the view, to find a path which might take them painlessly back to the villa. She thought she saw one a little to the left, and when they got up that was the way they went.

The stony track took them, without their noticing it, over the spur of the hill, and they came within sight of a new valley. It was wide and shallow, and there were cultivated fields making irregular patches on the plain. The mollified evening sun, rapidly sinking, spread a tender light over the dark vines and the

yellowing corn. In the middle of the plain the soft rays shone on a close cluster of towers, a small town on a knoll, glistening there amid the rich shadows of the valley like an unusual crystal in the dark liquid from which it has grown. The shadows of the surrounding hills slipped gently down their slopes, and as the valley filled with the thick, sudden twilight, the little town glimmered for a moment, a beacon aflame.

"My, Tammy, that's pretty, isn't it?"

She was still whispering: her long afternoon had exhausted her and she couldn't have spoken aloud. But she whispered now in awe and forgot the pains she felt.

Tamara nodded her head.

They came at last to the powdery road which led to the villa. They had come a long way around; but the detour seemed to have taken in, for them, all the rest of Italy. The two valleys contrasted so completely.

A cart came noisily down the track, jerking along behind a mule. It was Signor Lotti's cart, and they were relieved to be given a lift home.

Signor Lotti and his wife looked after the villa, cooked, marketed, cleaned. They were amiable people, who went forward with their work as though they would be doing it whatever and whoever might impinge upon their steady premeditated lives. They were both equally short and dark, peasants of the district; wiry and very alert, with brown eyes, each, which seemed always to be asking a pertinent question.

Once again Matilda felt the presence of the strange language, and could only smile. But now she had no energy left to make a pantomime conversation—she was utterly used up, prostrate with the accumulated, long-denied physical weariness. She sat in a corner of the cart and longed for her bed.

Signor Lotti knew they didn't understand Italian, but he tried to ask Tamara a few questions by using his meaningful eyes and the English words he knew. The girl sat on the bumpy cart with her chin on her forearms which she rested on her pointed knees. Her head was slightly tilted and she fixed Signor Lotti's mouth with a steady stare.

When he helped her down, he laughed aloud and drew her off the cart with a wide swing of his arms. She cried out with pleasure and ran indoors.

Matilda was too weak to get off the cart. With great difficulty Signor Lotti and Eric lifted her as gently as they could onto the ground. Then they had to help her indoors to her room, and laid her on her bed.



She was incapable of any effort. The greatest pain for her was that she was too weak even to smile and protest that she'd be all right again soon. When she was settled, she simply lay inert, and her mind tormented itself with useless thoughts of what she should be doing or saying if only she could find the strength to stir.

Tamara came into the dark bedroom to see her often that evening. But all she could do was stroke the big, fleshy arm of the old woman and go again silently.

Then she sat with Eric and Sarah, and they talked a bit, and had supper. They asked where she'd been. She told them, but never mentioned the crippled peasant they had met. She couldn't bring herself to talk about that.

She began to be interested in the Italian conversations of her mother and Signora Lotti, about the food they were to eat. The cripple had brought home to her profoundly that those indeterminate sounds were as full of meaning as her own language. She couldn't doubt that the wretched young man, with his earnest jabber, had really *meant* something, and had something important to tell her. Signora Lotti, she now knew, was meaning something when she uttered those weird lilting notes high up in her voice. It was no longer merely another of the sounds of the place, like the cicadas rattling.

Matilda stayed in bed the following day, and the blinds of her room were down, protestingly, against the sun which, willy nilly, seeped in through every square inch of plaster and boiled her between her sheets. She lay there sweating and sobbed because she was too weak to be busy. She began to have a fear that she might never get up long enough to realise the ambition which had taken hold of her: to go again to that neighbouring fertile valley, and walk between the houses of the little town on the hillock.

“WE’RE going to the town,” Eric said one day. “There are some frescoes in the church.”

“You’ll come, won’t you, Tamara? You’ll enjoy the funny little Italian town.” Sarah always tried to make her educational motives as dim as possible behind a veil of spurious attractions for the child. But Tamara wanted very much to go.

“We shan’t be long, Matilda,” Sarah called. “Are you comfortable?”

Matilda was out of bed and dressing hastily. In answer to Sarah she appeared on the patio, pinning the collar of her dress.

"Dear Matilda, are you up?"

"I want to see the town," Matilda said, "I think I've had a good rest, and daresay I'll make it."

"Are you sure you're up to it?"

"I think so, and I hope so, because if you don't mind I'm going anyway."

"Well, you must take it very easily," Eric said.

He and Sarah were beginning to be worried that Matilda would be a burden. They didn't mind if she stayed in bed, but weren't anxious that she should aggravate her complaint by being energetic. You never knew with people as old as Matilda just when they were going to "conk out."

But Matilda knew what she was doing. Perhaps she was secretly aware, in the mind that had been agitating itself within the prone body for days, that she must make this one last pilgrimage.

Certainly she had determined, lying there in bed, that she would visit the church of the town.

And she took with her an old prayer-book.

Eric and Sarah, and Signor and Signora Lotti, and Tamara and Matilda all mounted the cart and jolted off on the *cammino bianco* which led to the next valley.

When they came up onto the ridge and saw the valley glowing with its various riches, Eric and Sarah wished their villa was *there*. There were your vineyards, purple, shimmering under the whitish crystals of the insecticide sprayed on the leaves. There was your little Renaissance town—your city-state, in perfect order, and its very politics arrayed before you as clear as a coloured map: every farmstead, every crop displayed in its relation to the knotty hub of tall thin buildings, poking up in a cluster like plants to catch the light of civic glory.

The vineyards rolled by, fanning out their long lines of low-trained vines as the cart passed. And beside the road were the dank muddy areas and stony traces of a *torrente*, which here and there gleamed watery and cool.

The town rose up on its hill to welcome them. The cart entered between the white walls, and at once they were rumbling on the cobbles, in shadow that seemed for a moment like darkness.

It was a tiny township, and they quickly reached the sunny piazza at its centre. All round were the stone walls of the high narrow buildings. On one side, slightly detached from the homogeneous growth of masonry, rose, tall and grand on a flight of shallow steps, the *Duomo*.

The cobbled streets were full of smells—many unrecognis-

able and some pleasant, suggesting dirt and disease. Mingled with these were the rich smells of food: fruit, which lay in succulent heaps round the square, oranges, peaches, melons, and crimson watermelons cut open to tempt passers-by; pizzas cooking in a little shop, and bread baking close by.

Sarah went with Signor Lotti into the baker's.

"Come in and see, Matilda, you can watch them baking, through the window!"

Matilda entered the shop after them, and took a long whiff of the scent of hot dough. There, at the back of the shop, was a wide door with a great glass panel in it, and in a room beyond, men stripped to the waist with long-handled implements were pushing the rolls of dough in and out of the enormous oven. When the door opened, the overpowering scent and heat blew out at them and the men turned, with the damp brown bodies, to smile and shout cheerfully. One of them opened the iron door below the oven and poked at the furnace which shot its white flames out towards him.

Above this fiery activity was a high vault of darkness, with a little ventilation hole showing bright day between the black stones.

"I thank the Lord I'm not a baker," Matilda said. "That heat! I should melt straight away."

The baker whose shop it was talked a long while to Signor Lotti, a great friend of his. He was round and pale, like an Italian loaf made with oil, and he had serious dark eyebrows posed rather sadly over his blue eyes. He was introduced to Sarah and Tamara and Matilda, and gabbed volubly for several minutes. Then he said he hoped to see them all again, and they went out.

"The street's almost cool after that oven," Matilda said. "What it must be like to work in there all your life! But someone's got to make our bread, I suppose."

Eric came down the steps of the church.

"What an experience!" he said.

Sarah went in to see the frescoes, taking Tamara for the good of her education, and Eric, who couldn't resist it, followed her to get another look at those masterpieces.

Matilda was almost frightened to enter such a strange building; but she encouraged herself with the thought that it was a Christian church, and she couldn't go far wrong there.

With the sensation of wonder which she had so often in this new land, she pushed open the door. Inside everything was as black as if it had been night, and candles were burning like



stars in clusters spaced up the aisles. To her right an old woman was kneeling facing an altar in the wall. She was crossing herself and looking devoutly at a large statue—a Madonna and Child.

But that's not the altar, surely, Matilda thought.

No, it couldn't be *the* altar, because, just a little way further up the same aisle, another woman was doing the same towards another statue. Matilda was a bit bewildered, but she walked forward slowly, solemnly, looking for some indication that she should stop and find herself somewhere to kneel. People were walking about, stopping and crossing themselves, but it was impossible to determine where they thought the altar really was—they genuflected in all sorts of different directions. And although she grew accustomed to the dim light, she still could make out very little of the geography of the church.

She came out, suddenly, into an open space—and there was an apse and an altar bigger than the rest. But a priest in white was standing on the steps, and grouped around was a rather disjointed congregation. Matilda felt the guilt of one who has walked into a church to sight-see and finds a funeral in progress there. She put one hand to her lips and clutched her prayer-book, watching absorbed.

The priest was talking very fast and almost inaudibly. Raggedly, as though they had difficulty in keeping up with him, the members of the congregation knelt and crossed themselves and stood up again. Was that a Christian service? Perhaps, but it was beyond Matilda's comprehension.

She didn't know what to do. She wanted, badly, to kneel down and pray; and she felt obliged, now that she had come, to do so. But she was at a loss where to go. Could she just kneel in front of one of these statues and begin? It didn't seem correct to her, somehow.

Eric and Sarah walked past her, in the glow of a group of tall white candles.

"Not at all what I was expecting," Sarah said, terribly loud, Matilda thought.

"No—incredibly original, and the colour unbelievably fine; much more subtle than poor photographs make it."

They talked freely, but not about God or religion. It was easy to know what to do in a church like this if you'd come for something palpable like a painting and you knew exactly what you thought about it. Only Tamara, lagging behind, seemed uneasy, uncertain what she was supposed to feel.

"Oh, God," Matilda muttered, "Believe me, I'd pray if I

knew where to begin, but I just don't understand . . ."

She was cowed by this experience, the sudden revelation of a dark, cavernous temple enshrining mysteries she'd never heard of. She left the church quickly.

More slowly, she descended the grey stone steps into the hot light square. Then, amazed, she turned and looked up at the huge grey facade, punctured with rows of round-headed, slim arches, in galleries one above the other. The triangular gable, edged with a little zigzagging ornament which caught dark shadows, loomed against the blue sky.

She felt disappointed. She was more willing to blame her own faint heart than the idiosyncrasies of the Roman Church, but she nevertheless resented having felt at a loss, unable to practise the religion the church was professing to shelter. She opened her prayer-book at random, and seeing the readily-understood, homely English words, was overcome by a sudden intense longing for her home and for all the people and things and habits she was used to.

The church rose stark, grey, otherworldly before her: a symbol she couldn't fathom, almost as pagan in its infinite distance from her as a totem-pole.

She caught up the others as they were entering a dark-shadowed, narrow alley which wound under arches between high walls. It was a squalid little street; the people who lived on either side hung out their tattered laundry, dirty-looking even after it had been scrubbed, on strings to drip onto the cobbles below. The stuccoed walls peeled and were smeared with great washes of dirt. There was a strong smell, unidentifiable but disgusting.

Their attention was caught by a large poster, stuck up on a decrepit wall. The bill showed, with crude but clear illustrations, children being maimed unpleasantly while playing with live explosives which they had found in the countryside. There was a warning in big letters under these pictures.

"The hills round here tend to be inhabited, now and then, by people who leave that sort of litter about. You keep a look out, Tamara, you can't be too careful!" Eric was theoretic, disinterested.

Tamara and Matilda looked at each other, and knew what had happened to their peasant.

Once again Tamara felt the hills were full of lurking monsters. She kept looking at the ugly scenes on the poster, and turning away almost crying.

Matilda's sense of the strangeness, the alienness of the land,

intensified; it was a barbarous place, where children could be so easily maimed! Why, it was lucky she and Tammy had escaped during their explorations. It was a savage, primitive country, and the smells of this street stifled her and made her feel ill. The people lived in squalor and they worshipped God in darkness.

The gentle, cultivated plain was a delusion. The real harsh truth was the barren mountain and the merciless heat, and the battered, undernourished goatherds of the heights.

She re-entered the valley where they were staying with a totally new view of it. It was coarse, obscene in its crudity and barrenness. She hated it. She sat, now, on the patio occasionally; but she so hated the sight of the mountains that she preferred the darkness of her bedroom, where she could escape from all but the heat, and pray with more conviction than in the church.

She was beginning to take the little religious tags, to which she'd been brought up, very seriously. They were newly of vital relevance to her. She had rejected the surrounding land, and her prayer-book was all she had. In particular the homely English words satisfied her. Above all, her longing was to go home to England, quickly, quickly.

Yet she would not speak about it to the others.

So it was all intensified inside her, because she kept it to herself, and because she daily recognised the increasing urgency of her need.

Lying perspiring in the hot half-darkness—which she sometimes imagined was the great dark alien church, and sometimes thought was the baker's baking-house—she came to the conclusion that she was dying. The heat, whether she sat out on the patio or retreated into her room, oozed in, wrapping itself suffocatingly round her, adhered stickily to her flesh, until she was a flabby, helpless thing, lying inert in her own dampness.

She retained her physical courage. As she lay contemplating the approach of death, measuring its advance by days, she wasn't frightened. Since she had seen the young maimed peasant the thought of pain only made her angry. But she became more and more frustrated by the torpor which prevented her from acting. Her wish to return to London became a passionate obsession, something she longed for with a fervour which increased as she saw the possibility of it dwindle.

Then she began to doubt whether she might accept death placidly unless she were able to enter her own church, where she knew how to act, before dying. In this strange place, it seemed that she must have abandoned faith, simply because there was no local expression of her own form of Christianity.



That became the hub of her swiftly-revolving thoughts. And she decided, in the fear that she might die suddenly, with no-one near, to tell the others what she was thinking.

In the evening when it was cool, she sat on the patio with Sarah and Eric. She looked out over the valley. The land hid its bare ugliness under the deceptive dark.

"You're feeling better this evening, Matilda, are you?" Sarah asked.

"Ah, I always feel better when the sun's gone," she said. "I'm afraid I won't be any better tomorrow than I was today."

"I'm very sorry we brought you all this way, Matilda, it's really terrible for you."

"No, you've no need to be sorry, except on your own account. I'm glad to have seen a foreign country before I die."

"It's a wonderful experience, isn't it? But you won't die just yet, will you?"

Matilda almost laughed. Sarah couldn't disguise her complete familiarity with the idea of the nurse's death.

"Bless you, I think it's very likely."

"Not before we get home?"

Matilda ignored the rudeness of this. She was aware of Sarah's indomitable selfishness.

"I very much hope not, indeed. But I shouldn't be surprised if I were to go—any minute as you might say."

"Matilda!" Sarah jumped up. "You're not that ill, are you?"

Once again the thing she found to say had two meanings. Matilda took it kindly again.

"I don't know how ill I am, I really don't. But I—I get a presentiment, if you know what I mean. I can't help feeling that I *will* go before we're home again."

"Don't say that Matilda. You mustn't take any notice of your pessimistic fears."

"Well, whether I take notice of them or not, I want to say this: when you once begin to foresee your own death—as I have been doing; then you start thinking about things you'd always put to one side—like a Christmas pudding, waiting on the shelf all the year until someone says, why, it's the season for Christmas puddings, and it gets unwrapped and heated up again." The idea made her pause.

"Well, what things have you been heating up again?" Sarah asked.

"It's a question of—of religion," Matilda resumed, gingerly. "I hope you'll take me seriously," she asked, remembering Sarah's light agnostic scorn.

"I always take you seriously," Sarah said. It was untrue: she had never considered anything appertaining to Matilda seriously, ever.

"As I say, you start thinking of these things when you're about to die. Now, I was brought up a Protestant, and I don't want to die between two stools, if you see what I mean. I want to make quite certain what's going to happen to me when I die."

"Yes, of course, but you don't *know* you'll be here . . ."

Sarah wanted to get off the topic.

"Maybe, but I want to take precautions. I want to make sure you'll know, when I'm gone, to cremate me as I've always intended."

"But of course, Matilda, don't worry, we'll bury you properly."

"Not buried, not buried—cremated."

"Yes, yes."

Matilda went back to her bed. She seemed to have advanced a step nearer the end, now that was dealt with.

Eric and Sarah sat silent after the old woman had gone. They had discussed the likelihood of her decease in a desultory way, often, since she had first collapsed. They were both irritated by the trouble, but, at the same time, felt benevolent towards her and ready to do as she requested. Neither of them, really, had come to terms with the probability that Matilda would die. So they were able to go on being nonchalant about it. They didn't share the same emotions which had led Matilda to insist on being cremated—an irrelevancy in their minds; nevertheless they would obey her wish.

WHEN Matilda felt herself going, two days later, she called them to her room. They ran to her in the curtaained dimness, and stood by her with concern in their hearts. The good old soul lay there, as she'd lain for weeks now, with her arms straight beside her body, and her head balanced awkwardly, flat on the pillow in a position which seemed to be affording no relaxation to the muscles of her neck.

She was smiling, with all her countenance. It was a gentle smile, not happy, but peaceful, because she had nothing further to worry herself about. She knew she couldn't reach home, and she had prepared herself to make her own private arrangements for the future welfare of her soul, since there was no-one who could help her in that matter. To the others, looking on as though they were watching a film in the cinema, she simply smiled, and

that was a great relief to them. They didn't have her discomfort, her unhappiness, on their conscience. On the other hand, there was nothing they could busy themselves doing to relieve any pain. All they could do was stand beside her, looking down into her face, and wait, sympathetic. The smile seemed to be saying, "Not long now, only wait a bit": they couldn't leave, go back to the patio for a soothing drink.

"Can you imagine anything more frustrating," Matilda said quietly after a while. "To be dying of exhaustion, yet without having moved an eyebrow for days! Ah, it's cruel, this sun, murderous."

Signora Lotti came creeping in, bringing the patient a drink. Her husband stood at the door, looking on with big eyes. They both were strangely moved by this unexpected affliction visited on the holiday-makers, and behaved with a deference which they would have scorned in their own family. They took death among themselves as a matter of course; but it seemed to come as a revelation to them that people so different, belonging to such a different world, with different modes of life and feeling, could suffer this also. So the housekeeper tended Matilda with a deferential tenderness which the old woman warmly appreciated.

"Signora . . . bere questo . . . bere tutto," she insisted, sitting on the edge of the bed, holding a mug to the lips of the dying woman. "Va bene? . . . Prego, prego," she said, disappearing quietly. And Eric and Sarah watched this gentle kindness as though from a distance. They were simply watchers, witnessing something apart, which they had expressed no desire to witness, and in which they couldn't participate.

So they waited, standing all the time as though it would be impious to sit; yet failing to contribute even their sympathetic presence to the last moments of Matilda: because their presence, and their sympathy, was mechanical.

The stillness they were forced to preserve became oppressive. For an hour no-one moved in the room. Matilda's face still smiled, and they both thought she must be unconscious. But in fact her mind was full, wholly conscious, occupying itself all the while with the things she had become concerned with. She prayed; she thought of her home, her life; every detail of it was clear to her. And it was as though all these things were part of her prayer. She never doubted that she was dying, in spite of this industrious mental activity: all the time her body seemed to be receding from the compact, buzzing hive of alert thoughts; the flesh peeled back, shrivelled away from it leaving it free, conscious as ever, yet in darkness. She felt as if she were in a trance; but



it was such a trance that only her physical self was numbed, melted away, and her real self was liberated and exultant. Her earthly life faded into darkness; yet she would go on living.

The buzzing thoughts busied themselves endlessly, and the gentle sound they created lulled her, hour upon hour. Suddenly she wanted to say something, and it was as if she had been meditating in her rocking chair: an idea came to her and she voiced it. But although she thought she was saying, "Where's Tammy? Has she gone to bed yet?"—the two watchers, all at once gratefully alive and helpful, straining to hear what the lips murmured, caught nothing. They watched the lips move and received only silence.

Then they thought that perhaps Matilda *was* dying. There was a difference between the self-possessed smile and this helplessness, this ultimate failure of the body to cooperate with the soul. It stirred them into usefulness. Eric called for a drink. Sarah rubbed the patient's hands, soothed her brow. She noticed that now, instead of being red and hot, Matilda's flesh was cool and very pale.

"I'm afraid she's gone, Eric," she said; and she was genuinely distressed. The nurse and companion of their little girl had suddenly ceased to exist. It was an alarming thought.

Eric, with a medical detachment that was quite affected, felt the pulse, rubbed the back of the inert hand. He heaved a deep sigh, and walked out of the room. Sarah had crossed her arms on her breast and was staring piteously down at the cool, calm face of the old nurse. She was thinking of Tamara, and wondering what effect this blow would have on her impressionable little spirit. At the same time, too, she was feeling the blow herself with a force she hadn't at all anticipated. She stood immobile, caught by the event unawares. At last she could walk slowly out of the room and she remembered that she'd been standing still for a long time. She sank into a chair on the cool patio in the summer darkness and fell instantly asleep.

**W**HEN she awoke the dawn had broken. The valley was in a state of freshness and tenderness it knew only at that early hour. The sun gave every dewy object a dim silvery luminosity which contained all the colours of the spectrum; and a long cool shadow lay across the landscape. It was already appreciably warm.

She heard the sound of sobbing in the house. She went to Tamara's room and saw the girl on her bed, crying with long

luxurious sobs. Sarah ran to her and clasped her tightly.

"What is it, love?" she said.

Tamara sobbed on, and gave no reply however much Sarah asked. It was as though the child thought her mother's question absurd and obvious.

Sarah went to Matilda's room, Signora Lotti was there, stooping over the bed. She was finishing the job of laying out the corpse, which she had applied herself to unasked, with her peasant's sense of a necessary task to be done.

"Signora!" the housekeeper burst out, when she saw her. "La ragazza—lo piccola—era equi . . ."

"Oh, no!"

Tamara had wandered into Matilda's room, awoken by Heaven knew what disturbing spirit, and found, not her old nurse, but a naked corpse, undergoing the last physical attentions of its existence. The little girl had seen Signora Lotti bending over the body, but not associating the denuded pale figure with Matilda, had quickly come up close and witnessed the peasant-woman's operations, before she could be noticed and sent away.

Sarah was appalled. It was so dreadful for the child . . . the poor little innocent thing! How would she survive it? She went back to Tamara, and stroked her trembling body gently. But she couldn't say anything. There was nothing she could explain, after all. It was all too brutally clear.

Spent, she went to bed, where Eric was snoring tranquilly. They both slept until mid-day.

When they woke, it was hotter than ever. The sun seemed to parch the stucco from the walls as they watched. The olive-trees, the reddish hills, shimmered in a haze of heat, rising from the earth like steam. Tamara was nowhere around, and Sarah felt a lurch of fear with her. The old companion to whom Tamara's absences could be trusted had suddenly gone. But she was still full of lassitude, and as quickly as her energy revived, the sun sucked it out of her.

Signora Lotti, unperturbed in her inviolable routine, the routine of a whole race for generations, brought lunch for them on the patio, where they sat in the shade of a dry stuccoed wall. The housekeeper's manner was as efficient as ever, but conveyed subtly, delicately, her sense of the painful occasion, and she was tender to Sarah and Eric as if they had lost a beloved relation.

The sun moved around and burnt them out of their corner. They went and sat indoors, hot and still behind the blinds.

Neither of them stirred, though Eric got out his book and flicked over the pages, tapping his knee and whistling subduedly. He had slept well and had the energy that Sarah lacked, but he felt a restraint upon him to do anything more than sit. He had planned to go and see a town some kilometres off; that would have to wait for a more suitable moment.

The housekeeper came in, late in the afternoon, and began to complain of the heat.

They agreed that it was, really, *too* hot.

She wondered, respectfully, if they ought not to think what to do with the body?

"My God," Eric said, getting up and putting his book on the table open at the page he had reached. "We can't leave her lying in there in that heat, Sarah."

She'll stink the place out, he thought.

"Il puzzo, eh?" Signora Lotti said, smiling slightly. "Venite, qua," she said, backing out of the room into the large vestibule Eric termed the "Atrium."

There was just discernible on the air a smell which seemed like the faint foreshadowing of itself. There was as yet only a light obnoxious trace of it. Its worst unpleasantness was its threat of some heavy, sickening odour to come.

The three of them moved outside; the gentle, determined savour of death followed them persistently, hanging in the still warm air where it seemed to breed. Their conversation, in this atmosphere, became urgent.

"It's all been decided, Signora," Eric said, business-like. "The old lady wished to be cremated. So can we arrange something as soon as possible?"

Signora Lotti smiled her deferential smile. Cremation? She didn't think a cremation would be possible . . . in Italy one was always buried, always.

"It's true, Eric," Sarah said, "the Catholics disapprove of cremation. It would be difficult to find a crematorium here."

"But Rome," he protested, "surely there's a crematorium in Rome—it may be the stronghold of the Catholic Church, but surely some concessions are made to a cosmopolitan culture?"

Signora Lotti caught the word, Rome, though he had been talking to Sarah in English. She pointed out that Rome was more than a day's journey away.

"If you're going to take her to Rome, you might as well fly her back to London," Sarah said. "I'm afraid this is urgent. We shall have to find somewhere here—somewhere."

There was a bewildered pause.



"Surely the local church could make some arrangements—it must be possible . . ." Eric was spluttering, with the impetuous gestures of one whose pride is wounded. And the intransigence of local officials struck him as petty and did wound his pride.

"Non e possibile, non e possibile," Signora Lotti insisted. The priest was a most rigorous Roman Catholic, she said.

Eric grunted. He imagined some tight-lipped little Roman, making the most of his biretta and repeating "non e possibile", adamant before even hearing the case.

But it wasn't a question of hearing the case. Either the local church did cremate, or it didn't.

"She'll have to be flown home."

"Eric, it's impossible—in this heat . . ."

All the while they were arguing, the warm insidious smell felt its way further and further round the villa, and became sweeter and sweeter as it crept about.

"Allora," a deep hearty voice said, from the dusky road. Signor Lotti appeared, tramping up to the terranc with his boots white with dust, and Tamara sitting on his shoulder. He had found her crying quietly a long way down the road, sitting on the spur of the hill and watching the sun go down over the next valley.

Tamara was received with tender concern by her parents. Then, simultaneously, she and Signor Lotti became conscious of the all-pervading smell. The man gave a short, half-serious laugh. Tamara asked what it could be. No-one answered her.

Signora Lotti was explaining to her husband how things stood. He emitted a further short, loud laugh, and started to talk himself. Sarah and Eric could hardly catch the gist of his rapid patois, directed familiarly at his wife alone. She looked anxiously at them out of the corners of her eyes, as though doubting that her husband's suggestion would be acceptable. But he insisted that he was right, poking her shoulder with his big forefinger. In the end, she nervously indicated that she would explain to the others.

It wasn't an unpractical idea: in fact, it was an answer to the problem which in the circumstances no one could better. Signor Lotti proposed cremating Matilda's body by introducing it into the furnace of his good friend the baker. It would require his consent, of course, which Signor Lotti vouched for, and also the utmost secrecy—for reasons of local religion and local politics.

Sarah's reaction was one of utter horror. She could hardly believe her ears. Yet even as she cried, "No, no, never," she

knew it was perhaps the answer, and heard Eric saying,

"Well of course, it sounds nasty but it certainly fills the bill." Then she caught sight of Tamara, standing silently beside her, wondering. Mercifully, it had all been in Italian; now she hustled the girl indoors and told her to get ready for bed.

But a moment later the child reappeared.

"I can't stay inside, Mummy. The horrible smell is choking me."

"This can't go on," Sarah whispered to Eric. "We shall have to do as he says and our scruples can go by the board."

"Oh, quite, quite," Eric said; he had remarkably few scruples about it. It was Sarah who was slightly worried about the religious viability of a baker's oven as a crematorium. But the sight of Tamara, pale with nausea, holding her nose, made her realise that the first thing was to dispose of the body. Everything else was subsidiary, a minor issue.

"If we had any sense," Eric said bitterly, "we'd ignore the old woman's request. If she'd foreseen this . . ."

But he wasn't really going to go against Matilda's wish. And they both thought it odd that, in spite of the pressing urgency of the affair, neither of them would have been willing to do so. Like so many dead people, Matilda had more of a hold over them now than she'd ever had while she was alive.

**N** activity. He led his mule out of the little yard where it was. NOW Signor Lotti sprang into a magnificent flurry of kept and put it back between the traces of the old cart; then he scampered off to his friend the baker through the twilight which had gathered in the valley.

Meanwhile, his wife, with staunch bravery, dressed Matilda's corpse for the bier, which she created very imaginatively out of planks of wood. By the time she was finished, her man had galloped back and was able to help her lift the corpse, mounted on its bier, onto the cart which he offered as hearse.

Sarah and Eric didn't help. They couldn't bring themselves to go near the decomposing body. Besides, the Lottis knew so well what they were doing—so efficient—

Darkness had fallen. Eric and Sarah and Tamara were aware of nothing in the dark unlighted villa and its vast, still environs but the smell of death. The—cremation—couldn't take place until midnight, since it was imperative that no suspicion should be roused, and the town couldn't be said to be safe until late. So they wandered about uncomfortably, feeling too sickened

to eat anything, or even to stay still. In their anxiety to rid themselves of the foul atmosphere they left the villa altogether, and walked aimlessly along the track, under the big winking stars. The earth seemed to be burdened with the great weight of itself, and the hills were lumped in the darkness with a carelessness that seemed the result of exhaustion. The heat of the daytime continued to rise from the ticking vegetation of the fields.

They became tired and stopped to turn back; at once the thought of the villa, haunted by the body it had housed, drove them on again.

They reached the road which led up the valley to the town. Everything was dark and heavy and hot, like a limitless nomad's tent of black felt pitched on a desert. Only the enormous stars were cold, as if they had been holes cut in the tent to let in air and light. But they were a long way away.

There was a creaking and a clapping on the road, and, just as they got out of the way, Matilda's hearse, with both Signor and Signora Lotti in attendance, cantered past. They exchanged shouts. Eric and Sarah decided not to accept the offer of a lift on the cart; the idea of travelling in such close proximity to Matilda—who wasn't even in a coffin—deterred them. But they quickened their steps, tired though they were, and with Tamara asleep on her father's shoulder, went on to the town. Why they hurried, they couldn't have explained: they didn't in the least want to witness the consignment of the body to the flames. But an unexpressed, almost unconscious delicacy suggested to them that they should be present at what amounted to a funeral. So they hurried as if anxious to miss nothing.

But they took some time to reach the town, and when they arrived they had some difficulty in finding the baker's in the dark. When they did find it, it was dark and deserted, recognisable only by reason of the warmth of the air which hung about the door, and the faint smell of bread.

It was a dreadful moment for Eric and Sarah. In place of their vague sense that they should attend the last rites of the old woman, there surged up in them a conviction that their solemn duty had been neglected. They were Matilda's only friends—sole mourners at the last! They had been closer to her than any one else during the last ten years of her life. And then, surely, it would have been their presence only which could save the cremation from being a mere secular disposal of a corpse? Sarah thought of Signor Lotti, with his coarse peasant's face and short ironic laugh, and of the baker, coarse too and not even a friend of the deceased. And the baker's men—those two strap-



ping breadmakers with their sweating bodies in the heat of the oven. What did they make of it? What did they think of poor old Matilda? Was she, to them, a human being or a loaf?

Sarah tried to picture the ceremony to herself. She desperately hoped it had had about it something of the nature of a ceremony, to save it from being farce. And as they set off to walk home—realising now that they had missed the cart and would have to struggle back on their feet—she began, for the first time in the whole business, to cry. It was the ceremony that had been so important to Matilda; yet in their hasty attempt to give her what she'd asked for, they'd failed to give her what she needed. Something within her tried to insist that it was of no material importance one way or the other; that once the woman was dead, then her wishes and desires should be treated as dead too, since they affected no-one but herself—her dead body.

But suppose there were a spiritual importance in Matilda's wish? Oh, dear, Sarah couldn't cope with that hypothesis. It was too much for her—it opened the door to too many shattering possibilities. No, either one accepted it or one didn't—she didn't, and there was no good to be had from theorising.

"Well," breathed Eric, as they tramped the deserted road, "I hope to God the soul of the dear departed Matilda is satisfied with what we've done for her."

Sarah took his arm, and simply inhaled the thick night air deeply. It was no good troubling themselves if they *hadn't* done right. No-one could decide that in this world . . . and beyond that, it was disastrous to prophesy. But she clung to her husband's arm as if seeking protection from something which frightened her.

Signor Lotti came back down the road, looking for them, and so they were able to sit in the cart and be driven most of the way home. They were a little chary of sitting there, where the body had been. Sarah had a nasty fright; feeling about in the darkness for a good place to sit, she came across, with her hand, the planks which had composed Matilda's bier! She recoiled with a shudder and a slight yelp of horror, and sat carefully on the opposite side. No-one spoke: they were all exhausted.

Tamara slept until they reached the villa, and her father lifted her from his shoulders and put her, unconscious, into her bed.

The smell had almost vanished: it was evident that Signora Lotti had been busy employing every means in her power to hasten its departure. All the windows were wide open, and there

was a rather strong smell of disinfectant. But at least they could sleep.

THE night's rest dispelled their physical tiredness, but did nothing to obliterate their guilty feelings, which in fact attacked them more fiercely as they sat down to breakfast in the fresh-smelling villa Signora Lotti brought them coffee.

They were surprised to see her husband standing at the door, looking as though he wanted to come in. He was usually out and busy at that hour of the morning.

He came forward solemnly; he had a tin box—a biscuit tin—in his hands. He seemed about to speak yet uncertain what to say.

Sarah asked him, with nervous haste, as though she were afraid there would be nothing to tell, what had happened at the baker's.

He gave his short laugh, as though to indicate that yes, it *had* been in its way a scene of farce. But then he said that all the men involved—and Signora Lotti—had behaved with the decorum due to the dead; and that the baker had himself presided, being so moved by the occasion that he shed tears.

Sarah was pleased by this, but still not entirely satisfied. She wanted to know—but didn't quite know how to suggest it—if the occasion had been religious or merely sentimental.

As she said nothing, Signor Lotti went on to say, after a cough and a change in the position of his legs, that the baker had looked upon himself as the incumbent vicar, as it were, and had ventured, in the absence of anyone better qualified, to say an Ave and a Paternoster. Signora Lotti had knelt throughout the proceedings, and had wept.

His wife left the room at this point. Sarah wanted to speak, but then the little peasant changed the position of his legs again, taking a step forward awkwardly, and very solemnly presented Sarah with the tin box.

She took it, at a loss what to do, and embarrassed because she didn't know what Signor Lotti might mean by this ritualistic gesture. She smiled faintly at him, and then got up from her chair, imagining vaguely that the occasion demanded it. But Signor Lotti had accomplished his task, and was retiring respectfully.

When he had left the room she sat down again still holding the unexpected and quite mystifying tin box. It was rather heavy and the lid had been carefully and securely sealed. Supposing that she ought to find out what was inside, she tried to

unfasten it. But before she had opened it she experienced a sudden violent upsurge of emotion—a terrifying recognition of the full extent of her guiltiness, mingled with an overwhelming burst of relief.

"Well, what is it?" Eric asked.

Sarah's heart gave a little leap, and she said,

"Matilda's ashes—Signor Lotti has kept them for us."

## Marginalia . . .

(continued)

*"Festering Lilies: On Surveying the Secret Life of William Shakespeare,"* our lead article in this issue. For centuries Shakespeare has epitomized the problem of reconciling the artist's life with his art. We have the plays and the poems, but, despite the most assiduous scholarship, we still have great gaps in our knowledge of Shakespeare's life. The mystery is especially deep surrounding the Sonnets: we do not know the meaning of the dedication, we do not know the identity of the young man addressed or of the "Dark Lady." Readers disagree on whether the Sonnets are intimate cries from the heart or merely Shakespeare's entry into the popular vogue of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence. We do not know exactly when the sonnets were written, but most scholars agree that they preceded his mature tragedies. This vacuum of knowledge has been filled over the years by endless scholarly speculations, so much so that I had an immediate negative reaction to Strandberg's title: "Oh no, not the Sonnets again!" Without reading it myself, I circulated the piece to several readers.

As comments came back from each of the readers, I saw that the article had become a touchstone for revealing each reader's assessment of the relation between life and art.

Those grounded in the New Criticism objected to deductions about Shakespeare's personal life from the Sonnets. Each sonnet was to be treated individually, analyzed for imagery, sound pattern, and figurative language. Speculation on Shakespeare's love life was futile and irrelevant to the merits of the poems as poems.

The historical critics couldn't understand how the author of the article had ignored the prevalence of sonnet sequences among the Elizabethans, the conventions of the anti-Petrarchan sonnet, and other matters vital to understanding the context.



*The psychological critics thought Strandberg was on the right track but should have done more with the implications of homosexuality on the work of an artist. And the archetypal critics thought the article hadn't recognized the presence of such themes as death and renewal.*

*Intrigued by the revealing critical responses it had called forth, I read the article, enjoyed it, and found that it sent me off trying to sort out my own thinking on the problem of relating the author's life to his art.*

*In most cases, I distrust the practice of reading the author's life out of his fictional or poetic creations. This technique seems to me to be filled with traps. Not the least of them is the unspoken denial of the very thing that makes the writer creative: the unique ability to create an ordered, imaginative, world of truth out of the disordered pile of facts called life. Take the case of Ms. Jong again. We may know that certain facts of her experience parallel the adventures of her heroine, but it is difficult for us to tell—perhaps it is even difficult for her to tell—when her writer's imagination begins to shape or depart from those facts to meet the demands of art, which are not identical with the demands of life.*

*On the other hand, there are poems that are all but impenetrable without some knowledge of the poet's life. One thinks of the Romantics and of many of the confessional poets of today.*

*Shakespeare presents a special fascination to all of us. In essence, we cannot quite understand how this actor, with his show business mentality and grammar school education, could have become the greatest artist of our language. We know just enough about his life to tantalize us with the desire to know more. And perhaps the only way we can know more about Shakespeare, the mature playwright, is through the clues that emerge in some of the sonnets. In the present instance, Strandberg is interested not primarily in whether or not Shakespeare had an affair with a young man, for instance, but rather in re-creating the crucible in which Shakespeare the man suffered and Shakespeare the artist was tempered. The effort rewards us with some insights.*

*From the sonnet form, Shakespeare learned the discipline and compression that was to lend such enormous power to his dramatic verse. From the content of the sonnets—that perplexed and frustrated questioning of the joys and sorrows of close human relationships—he learned those truths of the heart which make writing worthwhile.*

—J.J.K.



# CONTRIBUTORS

**V**ICTOR STRANDBERG, who teaches English at Duke University, has been represented in these pages on two earlier occasions: once with an article on Robert Penn Warren's poetry and later with an essay on Whitman and Eliot. His work has also been seen in *PMLA*, *Criticism*, and *Shenandoah*. TOM HANSEN is making his second appearance here. He teaches literature and creative writing at Northern State College in Aberdeen, South Dakota. KATE JENNINGS has published fiction and poetry in *The American Scholar*, *Antioch Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, and a number of other magazines. Her poems will appear in a forthcoming anthology, *Landscape and Distance: Contemporary Poets from Virginia* (University Press of Virginia). SUSAN BARTELS lives in Columbia, S.C., and works on her Ph.D. at the University of South Carolina when not occupied with her verse. Her poems have appeared in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Poem*, and about a dozen other publications. Her first collection, *Step Carefully in Night Grass*, was published last summer. *Salt of the Earth* is the first published story by J.A.R. WILTON, a young British writer whose previous publications in the *British Museum Quarterly* have reflected his professional affiliation with the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum. Since many American writers have launched careers with first publication in Great Britain, we thought it fitting that we introduce Mr. Wilton to American readers.

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